



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*Fellini Roma*

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though the splintering of self from any radical group or political perspective is as damaging to self as to anybody, taking a revolutionary title and turning it into a commercial liberal film is even more damaging.

Lenin in fact decries what we now call (à la Mao) liberalism. In Lenin's day it was called "freedom of criticism." The ultimate trivialization (not popularization) of Lenin's important work, and I don't mean to appear religious, is the placing of the line "Que Hacer mi amigo" in the mouth of Susanne Peace Corps McCloud, who, after seeing the dead Catholic priest, leaves the Peace Corps and meets the Chilean/Cuban whom she asks, "What is to be done, now, today?" Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* is diametrically opposed to the kind of spontaneous revolutionary activity implicit in the above question; more important, Lenin insists that "without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice." Cultural activists today need the same advice he gave political organizers in 1902. We need to study before we run out again and waste our time and spirit.

—R. G. DAVIS WITH M. H. HOWARD

### FELLINI ROMA

Script: Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi. Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno. Music: Nino Rota.

There are some fantastic sequences in Fellini's new film. There is an evocation of a traffic jam on a Roman highway in which a film crew, purportedly Fellini's own, gets caught in a rainstorm, amid dying cows, swearing cardinals, burning cars, and stranded commuters. It is one of those ever-more-rare sequences in Fellini's work which treat a simple, daily matter in an abstracted, symbolic way, but still so beguilingly realistic as to become prototypes of the matter portrayed.

This ability to make one see that which one should really have seen all along but somehow hasn't seen, has been Fellini's major force. Because of it, his films have a haunting quality between realism and stylization even when they are (or rather, were) about everyday things.

In *Roma*, there are many examples of this ability. I am told, by critics over 50, that the evocation of the fascist era is more credible than memory. Perhaps, in taking elements of reality, separating them from the social flow, from history's deformations, his evocations replace memory. And his evocations, reality.

There is a sequence in *Roma*, an ecclesiastical fashion parade, invented but almost believable. Fantastic and increasingly morbid religious costumes pass, like floats in an eerie parade, before an audience composed half of cardinals with their ladies and half of Potemkinian puppets. As the costumes become bigger and bigger, their carriers' protruding heads become smaller and smaller, until in the end Paco Rabanne-type chain-mirror and neon-tube flashy popes' robes fly by in a wave of cold smoke, totally empty. Each model has its particular, secular characteristics: a model for the tropics demonstrated by a couple of embracing nuns in tropical helmets; a model for provincial towns with bicycles; finally, flaunted by a camp pair of monks on roller skates, a model called *Au Paradis Plus Vite!*

The mixture of fantasy and reality in all aspects of this sequence is so strong, that you are almost goaded into believing what you see. This mixture is still the thing Fellini does best. In fact, sometimes the suspicion grows that he may be on the road to losing the capacity for distinguishing the difference.

Thus for those to whom a certain tie to reality is not one of cinema's essentials, this must appear to be Fellini's best film since 8½. It is certainly the most formally cohesive. And if self-expression at the expense of engagement is a choice you are willing to make, Fellini provides marvellous alibis for renouncing social and political concerns. *To paradise, faster*, is in fact where he is probably going, having acquired the Jesuit talent to garb his Catholicism in intellect and form.

In this vein, his self-deprecation, or the surface appearance of it, has become a major confessional tool: the film is permeated by breast-beating cameos of people who berate him. Anna Magnani, at the end, is made to say to him: "Oh, go to sleep, Federico! I don't trust you!" And

students are made to ask him about his lack of social involvement (his answer: "I believe everybody should do only that which is congenial to him").

But there is no absolution and the self-criticism falls flat, because what he makes Romans say about him is not invented: it is what they actually say about him, and with good reason. They don't trust him, and they are right not to. This is no longer the real Rome. His reality-fantasy pendulum has swung all the way. This is a Rome of dreams and illusions. He is doing what he set out to do when he said: "Reality doesn't exist. The artist invents it."

On the other hand, it is an admitted subjectivity. It would be wrong to tag as simple presumptuousness Fellini's habit of calling his films by his own name or by opus number (8½, *Fellini Satyricon* and now *Fellini Roma* are the original Italian titles; *Juliet* is his wife's name). Foreign, more modest renaming may not do them justice, because in fact these titles accurately describe the contents of the films.

Unfortunately, they also raise our hopes, inasmuch as we expect to encounter a personality of some universal meaning, or at least a continually changing one, a character, as it were, who walks with the times.

In *Roma*, his most avowedly autobiographical work to date, Fellini does in fact seem to try to

do that. But the result can only be defined as sad. Against a backdrop of *carabinieri* beating up a contingent of demonstrators, a fake TV crew interviews tourists and snob personalities. "The stink you complain of," a blasé Mastroianni says to his current, pretty foreign girlfriend, "is the smell of the centuries." But if Rome hasn't changed for Fellini's characters, Fellini himself hasn't either, and the gauche insertion of a political banality has a similar effect to the one the centuries seem to have on Rome.

The whole film is in fact overlaid with this vague underarm odor. Interminable scenes are culled from Fellini's memory: his arrival in Rome in 1939 as a boy fresh from the provinces (incongruously long-haired, bellbottom-trousered and played by a one-face Texan); a twenty-minute pasta-eating open-air sequence of milked folkloristic effects; the standby brothel, inhabited by magnificent, fat-assed, warm-hearted mother images; the provincial cabaret, redolent with more heavy ladies, scatological humor and jovial vulgarity; the eternal Catholic *colleggio* and its biographical boys (even into this scene a heavy-hipped half-nude manages to creep—this time projected by mistake during a lecture on other, more traditionally architectural monuments); and all his other obsessions: priests, nuns, madams, hippies, monsters, and fair, remote ladies.



FELLINI  
ROMA: A  
brothel  
scene in  
the fascist  
era.

Add to this the strictly additive style of cutting, the musical underscoring for effect, fabulous decor often wasted by careless camera use, the lack of dramatic development, of character exploration, of viewer identification elements, of subtlety, of social consciousness, of storyline, involvement or even just plain compassion, and you begin to realize that the antiquity aspect, the faint mustiness, permeates not just the subject matter but the form of the work as well. It is the nostalgic odor of an aging talent.

But in all honesty, the space of a review does not allow one to do justice to a work which in essence is like the top tip of an iceberg. In terms of Fellini's life and career, every sequence has a meaning that goes beyond what we see at the top, and has a value in these terms. The question is, how relevant is this to the rest of us?

Also, why be harsh on a man who has achieved so much? To review a film that one doesn't like, one could argue, is a waste of space. But Fellini has such a following, not only among Anglo-Saxon and French critics, but especially among young people, that his disconnectedness from reality must be pointed out. We live in an epoch rife with trends away from responsibility. Involvement with the self is often used as a justification for our inability to cope with actuality. Films like this one provide alibis for those who refuse to try, by raising self-involvement to a pretended podium of art.

But finally, one finds oneself with a certain compassion towards this man who in his time has well-nigh revolutionized film language, and who for a period was perhaps a dying craft's major exponent. That is why the adjective that springs to mind is *sad*; nothing really critical, really destructive, because somehow one is left with the feeling that to attack Fellini on a serious level, to demand responsibility or realism, becomes irrelevant in face of his patent inability to go beyond himself. So one criticizes the pretense, the presumptuousness, the diminishing art, the unconsciousness of the possible effects, the banalizations, but all this with a certain ambivalent affection. Perhaps his last, yet-to-be-made conquest, after dropping the mantle of the neo-realist, the social observer, and the intuitive gen-

ius, will be that of not being concerned with criticism. Then, when his works become entirely hermetic, he will perhaps be happy. In paradise.

—GIDEON BACHMANN

## DELIVERANCE

Director: John Boorman. Photography: Vilmos Zsigmond. Script: James Dickey, from his own novel. Warners.

When keeping in step with their finest traditions, the strongest adventure movies implicitly double as moral fables. *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* serves as a good example of this principle as does this year's sleeper western, *The Culpepper Cattle Co. Deliverance*, directed by John Boorman, should have no trouble assuming a position of equal stature with the best of these films.

*Deliverance* presents itself as the chronicle of a rugged contest between a quartet of city folk and the white water rapids of the Cahulawassee River. The men have been drawn to canoeing down the gorge because the recent completion of a power dam portends the drowning of the entire valley and this is their last chance to pit themselves against the wild river. Shot on location in Georgia, the film effectively fulfills the promise of the scenario. The action is harsh, uncertain to the end, and loaded with unexpected dangers.

But delicately woven into the coarse fabric of this story is a complex web of multiple themes which are presented more through visible demonstration than the easy and less interesting vehicle of dialogue. Unencumbered by the drag of intellectual reflection, the film encourages a direct involvement with the plot while letting the messages slip through subliminally. The mixed blessings of nature and civilization and man's hidden survival abilities are the primary concerns—though subthemes do exist—but afterthought is required to make them visible. The complementary qualities of the adventure and the philosophy form a full and exciting experience.

The boatmen consist of Lewis (Burt Reynolds), a man self-consciously compelled to